

Stretching Routines Benefit Tactical Athletes

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Key Points:

- Each year thousands of tactical athletes are injured due to the demands and risks of their job.
- Job tasks may require going from a position of rest to a high intensity activity in a short amount of time, precluding an adequate warmup.
- A daily, whole-body stretching routine would allow tactical athletes (i.e., first responders and military) to be more physically ready to perform when called upon.

Tactical athletes must be able to spring into action when given little notice of an emergency. Unfortunately, in the time prior to the emergency they are often sedentary, which puts them in a position where they are required to go from little to no movement to high intensity activity in a matter of moments¹. Sudden and abrupt movements can be injurious if muscles and joints are not properly warmed up and prepared for activity. The development of a dynamic stretching routine can help improve performance for tactical athletes by reducing the risk of injury, releasing potential physical and mental stress, and preparing them for the tasks and movements that may occur while on the job².

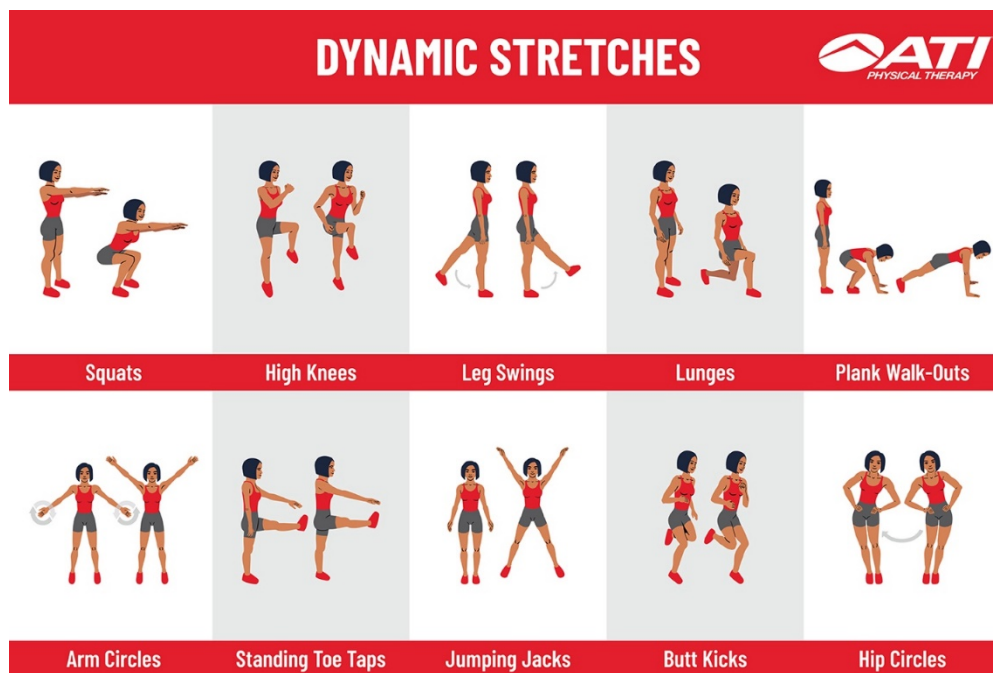


Figure 1: Potential dynamic stretches that can be incorporated in the tactical stretching routine⁴.

A tactical stretching routine should be designed based on the tasks and needs of the population. The routine should consider the at risk-movements and common injury sites inherent to the tactical populations when stretching exercises are chosen³. Tactical movements range from slow, methodical movements to high speed, intense movements. The movements include running, jumping, throwing, and loaded rotational tasks. With these

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movements, the muscles that are typically used and injured include the shoulders, knees, and lower back. As shown in figure 1, the dynamic stretching includes exercises to prepare the body for these movements⁴ and subsequently elevates the core temperature of the tactical athlete⁵. This can facilitate performance by improving active range of motion, warming up muscles and preparing joints to spring into action to take on the tasks of the job.

Keeping the warmup routine simple is recommended due to the time constraints and obligations first responders have. Difficult and complex stretches should be avoided due to the various fitness levels amongst the tactical groups. Easy to perform stretches should be performed prior to a shift to elevate the core temperature of the body and facilitate performance⁵. The exercises included should prime the body for action and should stretch areas of the body more prone to injury. Ultimately, a tactical stretching routine should facilitate a safe, active range of motion and prepare muscles for actions specific for each group¹. This allows for decreased injury risk and increased confidence for tactical groups to perform their responsibilities.

References

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